

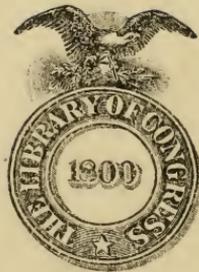
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A PRESENT DAY
DEFINITION
OF CHRISTIANITY

LAURA H. WILD



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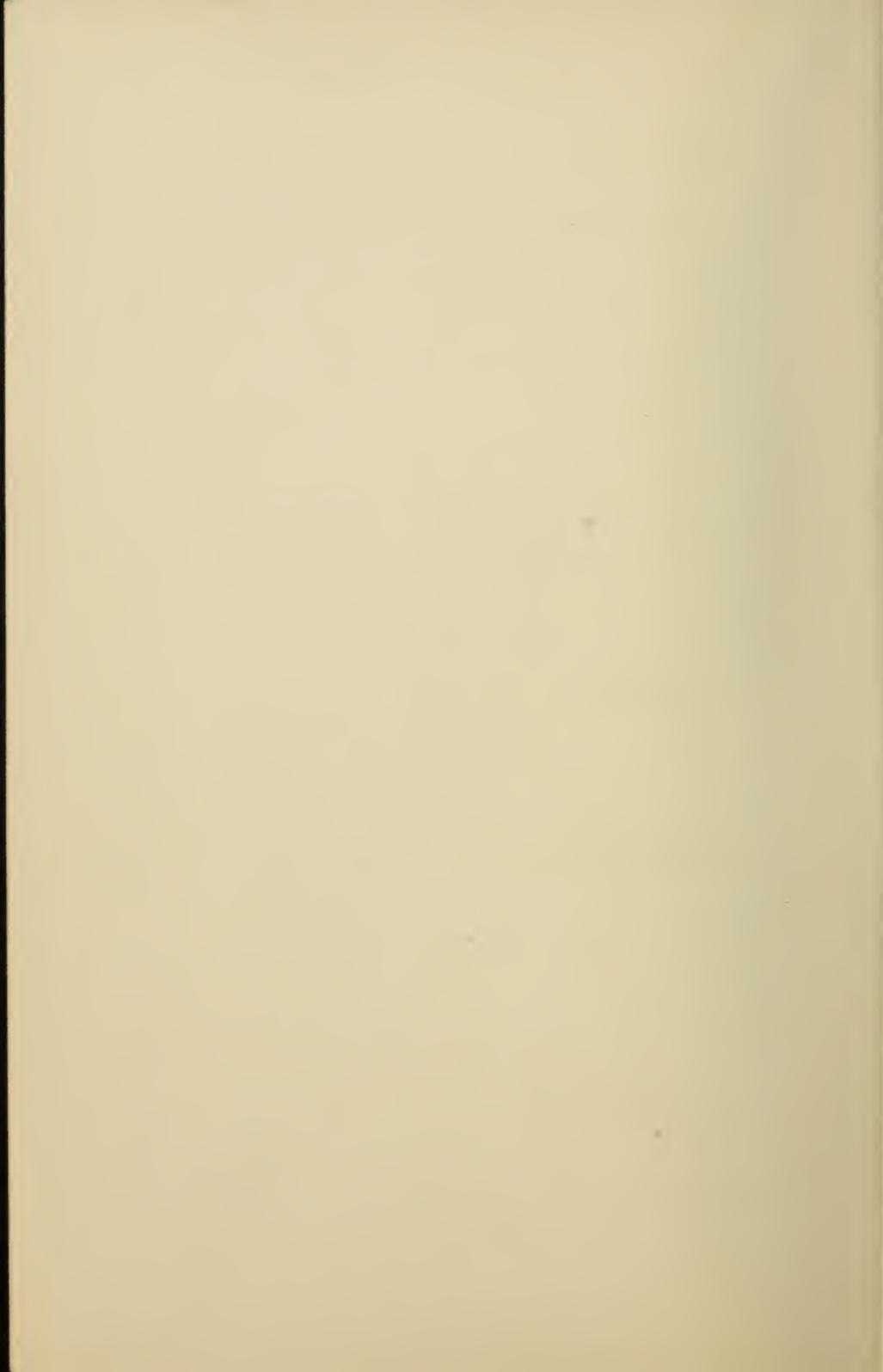
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A PRESENT-DAY DEFINITION
OF CHRISTIANITY



A PRESENT-DAY DEFINITION
OF CHRISTIANITY

BY

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MOUNT HOLYOKE COLLEGE

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FOREWORD

“How can Christianity be defined in present-day terms?” is not a new question; in each generation it has been asked by thousands of searchers after truth as well as by the skeptical and antagonistic. But to-day it comes to us with new insistence. The last five years have brought about tremendous changes in religious thought. Our thinking is confused at the very time when we are face to face with the realities of a world to be rebuilt. The Christianity to be expressed for the new age must be a Christianity which will meet unprecedented human needs.

Miss Wild's discussion squarely faces this situation. She recognizes especially the need of a reinterpretation of evangelical Christianity for the young men and women of the student class, who cannot be held by an outworn

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phraseology. But she also bridges the gap between this younger group and the men and women bearing the brunt of our modern life who are still at home in the terminology of a few years ago.

The discussion strikes at the root of the matter; it goes back to the source of Christian thought and expression, to Jesus Christ Himself, and applies his own attitude towards religious truth to our need for an interpretation of Christianity belonging peculiarly to our own age. Miss Wild claims that the need for new translations of the Bible throughout the centuries is paralleled by a need for a "modern translation of dogma" which shall make clear the way to solving present problems between man and man, class and class, nation and nation. The writer has therefore rendered great service not only to clearer thinking, but also to nobler living.

MARY E. WOOLLEY,
President, Mount Holyoke College.

I

THE PURPOSE OF THIS DISCUSSION

We are to-day passing through a transition from one set of ideas to another, not only in politics, commerce and social relationships, but in religion. Rather, let us say, the *expression* of our ideas is now crystallizing into something quite different from what it has been in the past, for the process of change has been going on a long time. We are now becoming conscious of what has occurred and of the necessity of making our language square with our ideas.

The ideas themselves are not altogether new. It is our awakened consciousness of these ideas which is the new thing, and the fact that many of us are discovering vital truths that are new to *us*, although it may be

that the world has held them in some form or another for centuries. This is the same thing to us as if the ideas were wholly original. We often feel in our elation over such a find that new expressions are absolutely demanded and that the old ones should be thrown into the scrap heap. We feel that new wine demands fresh wine skins, and that there is absolutely no use in patching up an old outworn garment with our new cloth. It is not economical. It wastes both the cloth and our temper, and the time we spend on it could be spent on some new discoveries yet to be.

We have gone further than this, if we may judge, for example, by the attitude of many of our college students. So far as religious expressions are concerned, our training has been such that we do not ourselves even know the meaning of many of the old phrases. We have heard the words, but they have seemed to us to belong to another sphere from ours and we have been so busy with what were to us more important things that we have not had

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the intellectual curiosity to inquire whether such phrases ever did hold a vital content of meaning. Those of us who have been very carefully brought up in orthodox religious homes have had explanations given us, but, after all, religious phraseology seems even to this comparatively small circle something like the Old English of Chaucer, not the style we use to-day in table conversation or in laboratory work. And ideas that are vital come to us in language that is modern.

More than once I have had students half-way through college come to me privately to know the meaning of the phrase, "Holy Ghost," and I have no doubt many more would have asked had they been honest with their ignorance. All honor to the few who wished to clear up their vagueness and sing the doxology intelligently! Other students have said that "the Trinity" meant nothing whatever to them as a concept, and yet these same students sing daily in our chapel services Reginald Heber's beautiful hymn,

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“Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty, God in Three Persons, Blessed Trinity.” Others who have attended a service where the “Apostles’ Creed” was repeated have felt that it was a kind of shibboleth, to the orthodox a necessary password, but to them totally without meaning in so far as real living is concerned. The initiated may understand it, but college students do not care to waste their time examining into such an historic document when life is so full of interesting questions, which they cannot begin to compass in four short years.

This feeling of unreality in religious phraseology does not seem to be confined to students. There were recently some enlightening statements in an article in *The Atlantic Monthly* upon “The Church and the Civilian Young Man,”* by one who had served as a chaplain in the army, who said that he made “a cool, calm synthesis of some thousands of

**The Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1919, Rev. Bernard Iddings Bell.

careful observations of men." One of his italicized summaries runs thus: "The churches ought to recognize that they have never gained the interest and the enthusiasm of eight out of ten of the generation just coming to maturity. As far as vital motivations go, these fellows are not Christians at all, but merely more or less decent young pagans." Again he says, "If we are not to continue to lose young men, we must return to the teaching, in concrete, definite terms, of the essence of Christianity."

Paganism, then, is to be deplored and Christianity is to be sought after. But the expressions that church people are using in the attempt to convey their ideas of Christianity seem much less real to youth than the phraseology of paganism. Is the fault with Christianity or with the terminology? Are not the children of this world wiser than the children of light? Our commercial leaders have scored American stupidity for not presenting American goods to the people of China and

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South America in a form that they liked. Other nations, before the war, seized the trade we might have had because they were astute enough to manufacture their articles to suit the taste of their customers instead of offering them the identical shapes used at home. We are mending our ways commercially, possibly politically. Are we mending them religiously?

There are two ideas of the function of a college: one is that it is a repository of knowledge; the other that it should offer an educative training. The one says to youth: If you want an education, come and get it; if you are intellectually alert here you may satisfy your longings. Take it or leave it. Our supply of food is offered you on the cafeteria plan; pick up your tray, your plate and knife and fork, and come to our respective counters of beef and dessert and you will find all you can wish. But the other meets youth at the door, seats him at a table, studies his face to read his likes and dislikes, offers tempting suggestions, and

is much disturbed for his welfare and the welfare of society if he eats nothing. One is especially concerned with knowledge, the other with the youth. Both demand expert cooks.

Possibly the church, good as her cooks have been, has been especially concerned with herself as a repository of churchly phraseology, ideas cooked according to standard recipes, and not enough concerned with whether the food prepared looked palatable to youth, or whether the youth would turn to the place across the way to satisfy his appetite.

The church has been just as sure of its riches as the college has of its wealth of knowledge. It has not been able to comprehend why it was necessary to change its expression of truth when truth expressed in certain forms has meant so much to past generations. But such is the perversity of life: it changes; nothing stands still if it is alive. Even plants and animals that seem to a casual observer to be stable as to genus and form, and indeed the very rocks themselves, in the course

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of long periods of time, do change. The Psalmist of old said, "I will look up unto the mountains," as if in their towering grandeur they could supply that element of stability his soul so much needed, but in the very next line he corrected himself and added, "From whence cometh my strength? My strength cometh from the Lord who *made* heaven and earth," and explains that his reason for such confidence is not that the forms of God's most enduring creations do not change, but because God Himself neither slumbers nor sleeps but is watching man day and night as his feet tread the path of his pilgrim journey.

Are we not, then, justified in trying to explain to the youth of to-day some of our fundamental beliefs as Christians, in terminology that has a meaning for them in this time of transition, and of consciousness of growing pains? The object of this book is to try to interpret in the simplest possible language a term much used but very vaguely understood by the great majority of young people, *evan-*

gelical Christianity. This object includes the desire to interpret that term as Jesus would, not as enthusiasts for ecclesiastical interpretations would consider fitting, but as our Lord Himself would wish his young disciples to understand it. This, of course, necessarily involves the personal equation; anyone attempting to do such a thing has arrived at his conclusions by his own path, but it is based upon an honest attempt to study the meaning of the phrase historically and to study Jesus' teachings sympathetically.

In order to arrive at our goal of a definition of evangelical Christianity which Jesus would sanction to-day, we need to clear the way by being quite sure we understand each other when we use the terms *Christianity* and *being a Christian*. These three questions seem to be focal points in the minds of young people to-day when they are thinking about religion: What is this something about which we are talking all the time, called *Christianity*? What is it to *be a Christian* in this day when

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it is not safe or lovely to draw hard and fast lines? What is *evangelical Christianity*, which so many good people warn us we must embrace if we are to please the Lord Jesus?

II

WHAT IS CHRISTIANITY?

When a student comes across a term which he does not understand, if he is a real student, he rushes to the dictionary to fortify himself. He also begins to make his own definition if his term refers to a matter of common observation. He eliminates extraneous elements, watches this particular phenomenon in action, finds out what it does, probes into it to discover the secret of its power, and finally emerges from his investigations with ideas that are real to him at any rate, even if he cannot explain them quite so accurately as the dictionary. The dictionary is a corrective and a spur to further investigation.

Now this is the method we shall pursue in this brief attempt to arrive at an intelligible

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answer to our inquiry, What is Christianity? We will begin with some everyday questions about this phenomenon which seems to be ever present in the life around us, which is referred to, assumed as existing in our community life and yet is, after all, rather an elusive thing, at least hard to define offhand.

Question No. 1. What does the term Christianity stand for in your community? For a set of doctrines that certain people hold who go to church? For certain rules of conduct that respectable citizens are supposed to obey? For a spirit that pervades your community life? If so, what is that spirit? Is it then partly Christian and partly something else which we will for convenience call pagan? Would your home town resent the implications if a visitor should remark that it did not seem to know what Christianity meant in its politics or its business? Would it resent a placard posted at its entrance right next to the ones saying this is "The most desirable city for factory sites," or it is "The city of homes," advertising

that "This town does not understand the term Christianity"? If there would be an indignation meeting over such exposure, why? Can you formulate a definite answer in your own mind?

Question No. 2. What do you think the term means to a foreigner from a non-Christian land? Consider, for instance, a Chinese student sent to this country by his government. Would he be surprised to find that in a Christian country a different set of regulations and expectations as to conduct surrounds a state institution and a so-called Christian college? Would he become rather confused as to the meaning of the term Christianity, and if he should ask you for enlightenment, could you give it? Think of the Chinese student who has come from a missionary school. What kind of anticipations do you think he has as his steamer approaches the land that sent the missionaries to his pagan home? Does he get any shocks before the year is out? Does he have the same

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idea of the meaning of Christianity when he graduates as when he came? Will he be sorry or glad at the change? The term must then have some definite content of meaning. What, in a nutshell, is that content?

Question No. 3. Take two individuals who seem to stand in a different relation to Christianity because of their membership or non-membership in a Christian church. Would their definitions coincide? If not, why not? There must be some general definition which is true, whoever uses it. Is it possible to arrive at such a common definition that both church member and non-church member would recognize it as true? Why is there any difficulty in such agreement? Which one is the more exacting? Which one is broader? Which one is the more likely to be right? Can you apply the test that will clear up such confusion?

Question No. 4. Is Christianity the same as ecclesiasticism? In answering this question it is necessary to keep in mind the fact

that our churchly observances are the product of the centuries, that there have been many accretions since the apostolic days, that when Christianity passed through the hands of the Greeks, the Romans and the Teutons, many customs were added not known to the Hebrews. It must be remembered also that so far as creedal statements are concerned, they are the product of the Greek type of thinking, not of the Hebrew. The expression of faith in formal creeds was foreign to the Hebrew prophets and to Jesus. Not until we come to Paul do we have any approach to the philosophical or creedal manner of expressing truth, and Paul was evidently affected by the Greek environment of his early home. The question resolves itself, then, into this: Do the observances and creeds held by the church, no matter from what source they originated, Hebrew, Greek, Roman, Anglo-Saxon or even oriental, as some maintain,—do these observances and creeds represent Christianity? Or is Christianity something that may be

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found imbedded in them but not necessarily truly represented by everything ecclesiastical?

Question No. 5. Should Christianity be confined to the teachings of Jesus Christ and to the apostolic interpretation of his teachings to be found in the New Testament, or should we conceive that as men have pondered upon the germ of truth there revealed they have seen it in larger outline than was possible in apostolic days? In other words, is Christianity a much broader conception of truth than can be found in the Bible and are we to accept all the later enlargements and explanations as a genuine part of Christianity itself?

There are two phases to this question. Did Jesus, called the Christ, after whom Christianity was named, plant in the world the germ of all truth afterwards to blossom out into Christianity, so that later additions were simply new interpretations and not new or extraneous truth? Or is Christianity really a larger thing than Jesus Himself ever dreamed it would be? In other words, has man gone on

building upon the truth of the New Testament until now the New Testament cannot be expected to hold that truth?

Question No. 6. Is Christianity, then, absolutely differentiated from all other faiths or has it absorbed many qualities found in pagan religions? If the latter is the case, how may one draw the line between pagan truth and Christian truth? If we say it is all God's truth wherever found, why do we apply to it this limited term, Christianity? Why not more truthfully call ourselves Syncretists rather than Christians? If, as it is accepted now, it stands for an occidental as against an oriental interpretation of truth, are we not very narrow, not to say intolerably conceited westerners, to affirm that this occidental religion of ours is the only one worth holding? May there not be an oriental interpretation quite as true to the original germ-idea as the occidental phase of which we boast? Must we not, if we are fair-minded, make our faith cover much more than its historic origin

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would seem to warrant, and grant that the term itself has changed in its meaning as so many words in our English language have changed?

Question No. 7. Should we, then, confine the term Christianity to those people who are trying to follow Jesus' teachings or even who have come under their influence, as distinct from the teachings of Mohammed or Buddha? Or should we make an entirely new definition that will fit our own day better, standing for all that is best and most progressive everywhere, all that grips anybody's soul, whoever he may be, or at any rate all that is constructive in building up character?

Might not such be the questions which a visitor from another planet would ask us if he were trying to formulate a definition of Christianity as he hears it talked about to-day? If we have carefully thought them through for ourselves it is time to go to the dictionary. And we shall find there a series of definitions which embrace nearly all the answers we

could make. The Century Dictionary states them thus:

I. *The religion founded by Jesus Christ.* This, of course, differentiates Christianity from the religions founded by Buddha, Mohammed or Confucius or any of the other great religious teachers. But it does not say it must have stayed as it was founded. In fact, there are three interpretations added, any one of which, it seems, is legitimate. (a) *Historical Christianity.* This is limited to the facts and principles stated in the New Testament. (b) *Dogmatic Christianity.* This embraces systems of theological doctrine that have been built up through the centuries since Jesus lived or the New Testament was written. (c) *Vital Christianity.* This is defined as meaning the spirit manifested by Jesus in his life and which He commanded his followers to imitate. It is evident that a vital Christian may know very little about dogma, and even be ignorant of the composition of the gospels.

The second definition given does not con-

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fine itself to the religion or the system of thought or the kind of spirit manifested, but reads thus:

2. *The body of Christian believers.* In other words, it is the group of people who have embraced the religion. This is presumably synonymous with the Christian Church. But in actuality we know it is not; for there are many non-church members who bear the fruits of the Christian religion, and Jesus Himself said that it is by their fruits we should know them.

The third definition swings out far wider than this, as if to include all the fruits that may have come from the planting of this religion. It reads:

3. *The Christian or civilized world, namely, Christendom.* Now we know that in what we call the civilized world there are many customs and beliefs that cannot have had their origin in Jesus. This definition must then mean that part of the world that seems

to have been leavened by his spirit, where his religion has been the predominant factor.

But finally, there is given a definition of an entirely different import. It is not the religion, or the church, or that part of society leavened by Jesus' teachings, but

4. *Conformity to the teachings of Christ in life and conduct.* That is, Christianity is an *act*, not a philosophy of life or a group of people, but ethical conduct as measured by Jesus' example.

In reviewing these definitions we seem to see that they all revolve about the thought, the spirit or the conduct set in motion by Jesus and his teachings. We may therefore sum up these definitions by some such statement as the following: Christianity embraces the thought, spirit and conduct traceable to Jesus' life and teachings. And this will square with our own observations as analyzed above, unless indeed we wish to ignore altogether history and historical derivations. If we do wish a term which will be broader than such a definition

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can give us for what we consider our most progressive and enlightened religious thought, should we not coin a new one, a truly syncretistic one, that will not be confused in the minds of the multitude with the historic associations with Jesus Christ?

If, then, we are satisfied with this definition of Christianity, that it is the thought, spirit and conduct in the world traceable to Jesus' life and teachings, we are ready for our next inquiry: What is it to be a Christian?

III

WHAT IS IT TO BE A CHRISTIAN?

One day before a college class of young women, I made what seemed to me a very axiomatic statement, that to be a Christian meant to be a follower of Jesus, and in order to be a follower of Jesus one needed to know what his teachings are. I found that there seemed to be objection to so drastic a requirement of a Christian and I finally succeeded in eliciting the following criticism, that the majority of people who are considered to be Christians are so thought of because they go to church, and are kind, and considerate of their neighbors, standing decidedly for respectability in their communities, and that this does not necessitate any study of the Scriptures or any conscious knowledge of the pre-

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cepts of Jesus. My answer was, that even though this might be so, such people were, even at best, only second- or third- or fourth-hand followers and that somewhere in the line there was someone who was making a conscious effort to understand Jesus and his teachings and to pass on his spirit, that the truest followers were those caring enough about it to make a thoughtful attempt to be in harmony with Him and that this involves very definite thinking and definite willing.

To be a diluted Christian is no more satisfactory than to have milk and water in our cream pitcher for breakfast, nor does it make the blue milk cream just to call it so. At the same time one must remember that to be an artist at anything one must have learned the technique so well that it has become second nature and one does not need to stop to think of every movement of the hand or position of the foot. But no artist, whether he be pianist or tennis player, ceases to exert himself to play well. The figure of the game was a

favorite one with Saint Paul and he charged the Christian to run so that he might attain, and said of himself as an example, "I therefore so run, as not uncertainly; so fight I, as not beating the air."

There is, then, something very definite about being a Christian. It is a game just as life is a game, and there are rules for it just as there are rules for playing the game of life. And the good player who knows the fundamental rules so well that they are a part of his subconscious self, so that he does not have to waste time thinking about them, goes on to think very consciously of the skill he can employ in applying the rules to better purpose. Is this not true of one who has learned the second great commandment? He may have ceased long since to go to Sunday-school and repeat it: it may be second nature to him to be polite to his next-door neighbor and thoughtful of his grandmother, but he is very consciously at work trying to think his way through the application of the principle of

brotherly love in his business and in the knotty problems of capital and labor.

And I take it that such a sincere effort to get at the truth of Jesus' principles involves an honest desire to let in upon them all the light possible. Does the parent say he will not send his child to any school because there are many schools and differently trained teachers and consequently different opinions about many subjects? Rather, he chooses what he thinks is the best and most up-to-date school and tells his child to learn all he can. Shall we be followers of the interpretations of modern scholars or of interpretations evolved in the less enlightened days of church history? Or, on the other hand, shall we throw away all that sound scholarship has discovered in the past just because it bears an old-fashioned name?

The scholar, whoever he may be, is marked primarily by an *attitude of mind*, and that attitude is one of earnest and honest search for the truth wherever it may be found. In so far

as in us lies, every Christian should have this scholarly attitude of doing honest thinking and letting in the light, whether his training has come to him through books or through experience. Such an attitude would solve very speedily many of our creedal differences. They would simply be dissolved into thin air in the presence of the spirit of Jesus. Differing theological dogmas have bothered the Christian very much in the past but they are giving place now to differing interpretations of Jesus' social principles. But whether it is the question of miracles and the second coming or of Christian democracy and the capitalistic system, the *attitude of mind* of earnest desire to find the true path and to let in light is fundamental, for only so can we ever begin to find out what Jesus' teachings really are.

There are, then, certain primary demands of the Christian. One of them is *attention*. This is an intellectual demand but it is not therefore simply for "intellectuals." Many a student who goes to college and comes forth

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with a degree has not attended to the business of living any more consistently than the factory worker who had to leave school before he was half ready. And many a professional person has put less clear thought upon living up to Jesus' teachings than the woman who does his laundry or cooks his meals. Many a speaker at the forums in our cities has been hard put to it to answer the thoughtful questions of the laboring people, and sometimes such people, who have attended to the lessons of life, arrive with more unerring accuracy at the real gist of a question than one who has trained his mind in the arts of the schools. But attention is certainly necessary in being a good Christian, for it is a business as well as a game, and great success is not to be expected of either the subnormal or the superficial.

A second demand is *consecration* or loyalty. One may define consecration as a whole-hearted giving of oneself to Jesus and his cause. This is the same as loyalty, and in order to be true to anything one must be loyal.

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The old-fashioned term, "conversion," means in the last analysis eliciting from an individual the declaration of his loyalty. In order to come to the point of such a declaration one must, of course, be convinced of the worthiness of the cause, that it is of such a degree of excellence that it is worth spending oneself for, that whatever it costs to stand by it, that cost is not too great.

Now the most effective appeal of the present day seems to be far different from the appeals of the past that have won many adherents, that have "converted" many souls. It seems to the modern mind a more convincing thing to think of Jesus as the suffering brother come to bear our griefs and carry our sorrows in order to show us how much God really loves us, than to regard his death on the cross as a propitiation to an angry God. The work for Christian democracy, which is the keynote of the modern interpretation of Jesus' teachings, seems a much more worth-while

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effort than to exert oneself to get into the body of the elect.

But whatever may have been the appeal of the past which was real for its day and which won whole-hearted consecration, and whatever may be the vital appeal for to-day, which after all may be partial, as we look back upon it in the future, the one fundamental element common to all true Christian experience is loyalty. We may well call it Christian integrity. That this is absolutely essential to our belief in a Christian is proved by the way we trust a person who has it, notwithstanding mistakes and failures, and we distrust one who has not shown it, despite beautifully worded prayers and outward conformity. When all is said and done, a good Christian is more to be preferred than a brilliant woman.

Does such loyalty, such whole-hearted consecration, denote fanaticism? Sometimes it does, we must confess, for to care for a cause very much means naturally that the weak, the slightly unbalanced, the limited folk, are car-

ried too far in one direction or another, not in their *loyalty*, but in their conception of the truth of the cause. To be perfectly balanced and absolutely fair is a very difficult art, and possibly in the long run, overcautious persons see things less in true perspective than those who give themselves utterly to the winning of a score much needed just now. It may be that the sin of lack of judgment will be forgiven when the sin of lack of loyalty is fatal. Someone has recently said, "At last perhaps the long disputed sin against the Holy Ghost has been found; it may be the refusal to co-operate with the vital principle of betterment." A refusal to co-operate with anything but one's own selfish interests is certainly disloyalty to the Christian cause.

The Lord's Supper is the memorial Jesus established in which we may unite as a sign of our loyalty to Him. And when the church gives the invitation to partake, as many churches now do, to all who love the Lord Jesus and wish to follow Him, it is an invita-

tion on the basis of attention and consecration, not by any means on the assumption of a complete understanding of what Jesus teaches. Interest and devotion are assumed as the fundamentals, for out of them will spring a diligent search to find the truth. And we cannot help but admire even those who have substituted some other sign of loyalty than the ecclesiastical rite of the Holy Communion, such, for instance, as a whole-hearted service of the Socialist cause, which to many seems extreme, if we find there an honest search for the truth at any cost to self.

But right here an objection will be raised and someone will say, Is there nothing to differentiate loyalty to Christ from other loyalties? Attention and devotion are required of the followers of any cause or of any leader. How are these characteristics to distinguish a Christian from a Buddhist or a Moham-
medan? The answer is that it is of course the teachings themselves and the spirit of the Teacher that make the difference and ripen

the Christian character, so that one may tell a true Christian more and more certainly as he becomes like his Master. Paul clearly shows us this when he enumerates the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. And it is without doubt some fruit of the Christian spirit, some great teaching that has gripped his mind and heart, which has proved the initial attraction to any disciple and won his attention and devotion.

But this is far from saying that any true follower or any group of true followers must have a complete knowledge of the meaning of those teachings or that any age has grasped the perfect interpretation. The wonderful thing about Jesus is that his truth seems to transcend human interpretations and local applications and yet Jesus remains the same, the constant factor in our faith. In other words, we are believing in a Person with such a transcendent personality that we cannot confine

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our appreciation of Him within the limits of any dogma or to the expression of any age.

Christian appreciation is a growing thing just as the Christian life is growing, dynamic, not static. And the very heart of our faith is in Jesus as a Spirit, a spiritual power, who must be worshipped in spirit if He is worshipped truly. And when spirit touches spirit neither rites, nor words, nor dogma can confine the flame; it bursts beyond such earthly bounds. This is the mystical side of Christian experience. Yet one may be a rationalist by temperament, scarcely understanding the mystic's primer, and still be obliged to confess, if he has diligently attended to the matter, that Jesus' teachings go far beyond what the world has yet caught up with in its intelligence.

Can one then be wholly Christian, even today in a so-called Christian land? If, for example, one is convinced that the fundamental teaching of Jesus is brotherly love, democracy in its truest sense, can one be a Christian in a

country where the very fabric of society is woven on a different pattern? While we are trying to change the pattern we have to live. Must we not live, then, half as pagans and only half as Christians? Must we not compromise in *act* when our spirit would move us otherwise?

Are we to be revolutionists or evolutionists in our attempts to be Christian? It would seem from a careful study of Jesus' own life that He chose the latter method. Here lies the struggle. It is of the very essence of spiritual truth that it outstrips the flesh in every way. Our reach exceeds our grasp. We must confess that we cannot any of us be ideally Christian but that anyone may be a dynamic Christian, a vital Christian, if there is within him such a passion for his ideal that it is urging him on to work and to live for it, in very truth letting his life be consumed by his love.

Now this involves something which is very essential to a real Christian. We have said it already. Let us say it again in a more con-

ventional way. It involves a deep prayer life. One's whole life becomes a prayer, an insistence that the vision shall become a reality, that the partial shall give way to the more complete, that wrong shall be displaced by right, that Jesus Himself shall come indeed and possess men's hearts. There is behind one's life a great urge, the pressure of a compelling power that makes him yearn for higher things both for himself and the race, that makes him want to break his bonds, that keeps him always from self-complacency and self-satisfied contentment, that leads him in the end to build a bridge from the life of the flesh to the life of the spirit, from material levels to spiritual levels, from life in the body to life after death. The Christian is not seeking religion for its consolations, but being religious for its ultimate ends.

Let us recapitulate. To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus Christ and this involves a conscious endeavor to get at the underlying truth of Jesus' teachings. The

marks of such honest endeavor are attention, the application of one's mind, and devotion, the consecration of one's whole self. Such loyalty produces Christian integrity; such devotion to the Great Teacher bears fruit in the understanding of his teachings and the birth within one's own soul of his spirit. But this does not mean that every true Christian agrees with every other one in his intellectual interpretation, which may vary as dogmas always vary. Neither does it mean that the interpretation of one age does not differ from the interpretation of another. It does mean that we are trying to harmonize our attitude of soul with the attitude of Jesus toward life and death, toward God and man, toward society and social salvation, and toward ourselves and our individual salvation.

The fundamental thing is harmony of attitude in love and devotion, in self-surrender and loyalty, in humility and teachableness. This carries with it the application of our minds to the particular problems involved in

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life and death, in social relationships and individual struggle and the honest intellectual statement of our convictions from time to time.

It does not mean that we can be ideal Christians at any time, but it does mean that the spirit of Jesus has touched our spirit in such a way that our eyes have been opened to see spiritual truth we had not seen before, that our hearts have been quickened to a whole-hearted devotion to that vision, that our wills have been nerved to action and that our lives have been given supremely to the service of our Master. It means that our lives have really become lives of prayer, of spiritual insistence, of the pressing of our soul onward and upward and outward to the attainment of the perfect harmony with the Spirit of Jesus and the Spirit of God. As Paul puts it: "Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, if so be that I may lay hold on that for which also I

was laid hold on by Christ Jesus. . . . I press on toward the goal unto the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus.”

Can anyone deny a place in the Christian fold to such a spirit?

IV

WHAT IS EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY?

Having discussed what it really means to be a Christian, what is the need of saying anything further? Many people would think it useless and perhaps they are right. But just because many good people are using the phrase "evangelical Christianity" to denote the only right and true way to be a Christian, and because a great majority of young people do not understand at all what they are talking about, it is worth while to get our ideas clear as to terminology. This chapter is therefore a discussion of terminology, of the derivation of ideas.

The word evangelical is the adjective form of the word evangel, which comes from two

Greek words, εὐ, meaning glad, and ἀγγέλιον, meaning tidings or news. "Good news," then, is the evangel and an evangelical person would be one carrying this good news, or literally, "a good angel." That is a beautiful expression to apply to a Christian. Those of us who have had "good angels" in our lives know that they come the nearest to being the revelation of the divine that any merely human being can attain. And we often wonder whence they derived their power, and their insight and their grace. But sad to say, the term evangelical as it is used to-day has not always a very close connection with our "good angels." It has become cut and dried; it has gone through the crucible of the creeds and seems to stand for some sort of a belief that a person must have if he is to be called orthodox.

Let us have recourse to the dictionary once more. The Century Dictionary says, "Of or pertaining to the gospel of Jesus Christ." This seems to harmonize with the derivation

of the word, for gospel is only the Anglo-Saxon for evangel, literally, "God's story," or the "good story," or good news.

The second definition is only an elaboration of this. An evangelical person is one "conformable to the requirements or principles of the gospel, especially as these are set forth in the New Testament," or one who is "characterized by or manifesting the spirit of Christ." This is precisely what we have been talking about in the last chapter.

But the third brings in theological terminology wrought out by the church fathers. An evangelical person according to this definition is one "adhering to the doctrine of the gospel; especially applied to a section in the Protestant churches who profess to base their principles on Scripture alone and who give distinctive prominence to such doctrines as the corruption of man's nature by the fall, atonement by the life, sufferings and death of Christ, justification by faith in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit in conversion and

sanctification, and the divine exercise of free and unmerited grace." The Standard Dictionary uses a little different phraseology—"Holding to what the majority of Protestants regard as the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, such as personal union with Christ, the Trinity, the fallen condition of man, Christ's atonement for sin, salvation by faith, not by works, and regeneration by the Holy Spirit."

Surely this sounds as if every evangelical Christian would need to be a theologian and moreover a theologian expressing himself in the terminology of the church of the past. For these are not the spontaneous expressions of the present, neither are they Jesus' words, they are creedal statements wrought out in ecclesiastical history when the fight was on between Luther and the Pope and farther back in the fourth century when Athanasius was declaring himself for the Trinity in the Nicene Creed against the heretic Arius.

The truth of the matter is that very few

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members even of our so-called evangelical churches could discuss these doctrines with any intelligence to-day, and our ministers, having once gone through a course in the theological seminary and presumably passed with or without credit, spend very little time in the pulpit elucidating such doctrines. They seem to think it very much more important to dwell upon such basic New Testament teachings as love to God, union with Jesus Christ and his Spirit, and the brotherhood of man. No one can escape finding these teachings in reading the gospels and no one who listens can fail to realize that the ministry of the church of Christ of the present day considers these great transforming thoughts absolutely essential to the regeneration of the world.

Modern scholarship with its greater means for accuracy and its flood of light from historical research finds Jesus emphasizing beyond a question as the heart and soul of his gospel, the need of the spirit of brotherhood.

We find this great divine truth almost snowed under by the philosophical discussions and creedal disputes of church history. We take to-day the two great commandments of Jesus, which are as plain as daylight can make them, as the foundation stones of a Christian world rather than the Nicene Creed. We are trying with all our energy to recover the ground lost for brotherhood in the quarrelsome days of church heresies. We regard Jesus, the Great Teacher, as sounding forth an ethical message, rather than a metaphysical one. He is the divine messenger of this good news of brotherhood which is the great and apparently *only* saving idea for the progress of humanity at present.

The Christian Church is beginning to feel that we have wasted time in our quibblings and in large measure missed the heart of the whole matter, the meaning of the life and death of Christ, because so many church members in good and regular standing have lost sight of what Jesus came here to do. And we

must get back to Jesus' feet and become as little children, as He said we must, if we are to be his true followers.

This is not only the saving gospel for humanity, but the only salvation of the church itself, which in many spots has seemed to let its vitality ooze out. Not separation but co-operation is the keynote struck to-day. This is the message, the good news, that the present-day prophets preach, and that the people want. And great good news it is, this evangel of Christian brotherhood which the spiritually minded have been able to hear and are trying to proclaim, finding concrete expression in a League of Nations, in the Inter-Church World Movement, and federations of many sorts. If this divine gospel of brotherhood could be set to work by labor and capital we all believe that much of the injustice, unrest and distress of our time would be relieved. Most intelligent people, whether they are church members or not, have come to feel that this is the *only* remedy that will work a cure.

So far has this gospel of Jesus progressed that it has thus, like an invisible gas, escaped its hard and fast bounds and crept into unecclesiastical corners, breaking out now and then even in such worldly and untheological organs as newspapers and popular periodicals. And yet many think it so ideal that it is not practical and, sad to say, some good church members are not yet ready to shift their emphasis from the Nicene Creed to the brotherhood of man. It is no wonder that the majority of our young people are puzzled at the use of the word evangelical in the old theological sense. That kind of terminology seems to have been stranded in a lagoon; the currents of life are passing it by very swiftly. Real Christianity cannot be dammed up like that, its powerful current will overflow the bounds and form a new course, whether we like it or not.

This is not saying that there may not be profound truths underneath some of those old metaphysical discussions. There doubtless

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were, or they would not have gripped the thought of man as they did. But a new phraseology is needed for a new day, and whether we will it or not, it is taking place. It is like the earth which belongs to the Lord, the earth and the fulness thereof. Travel in a new country and you see vast, unbroken stretches of prairie land, but soon it is broken up into farms. The underlying earth remains the same but not our use of it. It is the source of all our food and always has been, but our method of producing the food changes. This affects the whole landscape as we look out on it. A photographer in the air, as he flies from sea to sea, may look down one day on a great expanse of ranch land with bunches of cattle grazing here and there. But to-morrow he may see a patchwork of green fields, some growing corn, some wheat, and some garden stuff for a neighboring city, where it used to be prairie like the first picture. What has happened? The soil remains the same and we scratch only the surface of it at best, but

we do not utilize it in just the same way or use the same language as we did in describing it. Agriculturists are now finding out how to treat the soil scientifically.

Those laws have always existed, God's laws of soils. But the crops of boys trained in modern agricultural schools are more fruitful for these days than farms run on the old lines. Jesus evidently understood the spiritual soils He had to work with. He certainly was not the Divine Sower who went forth to sow, unless He did. The fundamental principles were what He based his work upon. Why not accept what He emphasized rather than stress the interpretations of the church fathers of any age?

Can we, then, find those fundamentals emphasized by Christ? There are certainly two, personal loyalty to Himself and to God, for He was only God's representative; and a belief in the brotherhood of man, which is but another name for salvation. And if we scan our list of evangelical doctrines carefully,

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they can all be brought under these heads. Under the first would come personal union with Christ, the doctrine of the Trinity which involves Christ's divinity, belief in the Holy Spirit and salvation by faith. Under the second we may place man's need, or in the old phraseology, his fall or corruption, Christ's atonement and justification, and the manner in which that atonement and justification are accomplished, or saving grace.

Now what if the modern mind responds better to the underlying thought of the Trinity, when instead of picturing three thrones and three deities in a very anthropomorphic manner, the illustration is used of the electric current and the central power? We attempt to ride on the trolley car but it will not carry its load unless the trolley is on the wire and that wire is charged with the electric current coming from the powerhouse and applied by the hand of the engineer. Thus the human soul comes in contact with the influence of the Holy Spirit, which quickens one's conscience

and energizes one's whole life through a knowledge of Jesus Christ who is the representative of God, and who can interpret Him to mankind. This is a scientific age, an age of dynamic power. Such an illustration is much more real to the modern mind than Sargent's ecclesiastical picture, "The Dogma of Redemption," in the Boston Public Library.

And what if men wish to dwell more upon the divinity of Christ than his deity? None of us knows much about deity. The nearest we can get to it is through divinity. It is only if our lives are hallowed in some way by the touch of the divine that we come near to God. And what if men to-day can define the atonement best as at-one-ment or having harmony with God, and justification by faith as the making right of wrong things, for that is its literal meaning, by displacing the spirit of hate and selfishness with the spirit of love and fellowship? And what if saving grace is just this electric current of Divine Love possessing men's hearts and meeting man at the very door

of his need and his wretchedness? Is such a translation of Scriptural truth non-evangelical? Is it not simply a more modern translation? We have needed new linguistic translations throughout the centuries. The Vulgate took the place of the Old Latin, the King James Version of the Bishops' Bible, the Revised Version of the King James, and now the Romanists are issuing a translation to supersede the Douay Version. Why? Because scholarship increases and new light is found, and the meaning of words changes. Do we not need a new translation of our dogmas as well? And what if outside the pale of so-called evangelical churches should be found many who really live in the light of such a gospel: shall we set up an artificial distinction or fail to have fellowship with them in the unity of the spirit, in the bond of peace?

This is a plea for co-operation rather than separation, for spiritual relationship with God and Christ and man rather than dog-

matic distinctions, for real discipleship and loyalty to Jesus' fundamental teachings. For these are critical days. The world will go on; there is no question of that. Spiritual forces both good and bad, helpful and pernicious, will work their works; there is no doubt of that. But whether men and women, labor and capital, senators and presidents, church members and non-church members, privileged students and untrained toilers, lay hold of the real saving grace or not is a question fraught with much anxiety at the present moment. It is worth sacrifice and devotion to accomplish. It is a mission as worthy as any crusader's mission. There are many of us who love the church so much that we want her to take the lead. We would sing with John Mason Neale:

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Christ the head and corner-stone,
Chosen of the Lord, and precious,
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